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*THE MYSTICISM OF MAETERLINCK*

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The publication of *The Blue Bird* a year or two ago, and later its successful presentation on the stage, has awakened new interest in an author whose fame and influence seemed somewhat on the wane. It is now some twenty years since a little volume of essays by Maurice Maeterlinck caused the author to be proclaimed with a flourish of French trumpets as the "Belgian Shakespeare," the "European Emerson," and the "greatest mystic of the age." And these epithets and designations were not without some reason. *The Treasure of the Humble*, which helped to call them out, became of genuine soul-value to many people who could lay no claim to that particular virtue. The author's later essays, too, were conceived in a somewhat similar vein. *The Buried Temple* and *The Double Garden* contain hidden teachings of a deep and subtle character, which, being born of spiritual insight, shed light upon the path of destiny and duty.

As I say, however, the fame of Maeterlinck from a purely popular point of view has hardly been increased for some years past until his entrancing little play of *The Blue Bird* was put upon the stage. It was the first of the author's many dramas to prove popular,—the first perhaps that was clear as to its meaning; one might almost say, the first in which it was possible to know what the author really meant. He came out at last from the shadows into the sunlight; he forsook the depths of gloomy woods, where the scenes of so many of his previous plays were laid, and gave himself up to interpret the hearts and minds of little children. For this reason, as for many others, it seems worth while to study with some care the teachings of a man whose message might appear to be falling on a deaf, or somewhat heedless, world. In an age of socialism here is a prophet of individual salvation, and at a time when material welfare is the thing considered most, it is refreshing to find some one talking of the soul. And yet, in another way, it may be said that Maeterlinck is one of the most typical teachers that our age contains. He is a startling epitome

of the state of modern thought. In him and his teachings we may see what the world apparently is coming to, if not indeed where it actually has arrived.

We can hardly speak of Maeterlinck, however, as a distinctly modern prophet. There is a curious atmosphere of mediaevalism about all he writes; a mingling of the old and new, of the ancient East and the modern West. Although he lives in the twentieth century, and finds twentieth-century readers in abundance, there seem to cling about him the garments of the century that nurtured Francis of Assisi, or of that later age which gave birth to a Saint Theresa, or a Madame Guyon. To explain this we must look for a moment at the conditions out of which he came, and consider the environment that helped to shape him with delicate and gentle hands.

Professor Royce has said that William James was distinctly American in his philosophy. In his interesting address before the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa he called attention to the fact that James's pragmatism was an outgrowth of a civilization whose watchword is "efficiency," and that America, and no other country in the world, could have brought to birth and nourished to perfection that free and daring style, with its forceful images drawn from local life and speech. In James, he declared, "certain characteristics of our national life have found their birth. . . . His robust faith is the spirit of the frontiersman, of the gold-seeker, of the home-builder, transferred to the metaphysical and religious realm." And so it is, in a precisely opposite direction, with Maeterlinck. In his books, and the style they are written in, we seem to see a clear and true reflection of the quiet courtyards, the shaded convent gardens, and the bent and gray old gateways leaning up for support against some thick-set, moss-grown wall, that are so distinctive of his native land. There are few parts of Europe where the veil of mediaevalism lies so closely drawn across the face of things as it does in certain corners of Flanders. It is all the more apparent, moreover, for being violently rent and torn in places by the insistent and intruding hands of modern industry and enterprise. This is true, for instance, of such towns as Bruges and Ghent. Bruges is one of the sleepest old cities on the continent of Europe. Its dull and stagnant but

winding, picturesque canals appear to find a counterpart in the slow-moving and deliberate currents of traffic and of trade. Nor is Ghent much different from it except in having felt more heavily the great black hand of modern factory life, which is a hand of death indeed to the beautiful, the artistic, and the picturesque. In Ghent, therefore, to a singular extent the new and old stand forth as deadly rivals, while the mediaeval and the modern jostle one another openly upon the streets. Many a gray old gabled house has been converted into a workshop, and a beautiful gothic guild-hall half turns its back upon a giant factory.

It was in this half-modern, half-ancient town of Ghent that Maurice Maeterlinck was born in 1862; and to those who are familiar with his writings it is evident that his early surroundings laid firm hold upon his thoughts. The son of Roman Catholic parents, he was sent for his education to the local Jesuit college, where, no doubt, it was hoped that his steps would be guided toward the priesthood. And, indeed, of the eighteen boys in his special class eleven followed this traditional course. But Maeterlinck revolted. Although, like his transatlantic master and acknowledged guide, he

Liked a church and liked a cowl,  
And loved a prophet of the soul;  
Yet not for all his faith could see  
Would he a cowlèd churchman be.

To please his father he agreed to study law, although his thoughts were evidently far afield throughout the process. One case he argued and no more, and that he lost; after which he gave himself to the pursuit of letters. A vague, wild, fearful bit—"The Slaughter of the Innocents"—ushered him upon the field of literary strife, where now we are free to think how great a slaughter of innocent hope and promise it would have been, had parental influence sufficed to enclose and cramp him either in the church or court-house.

But when we have chronicled these outward facts of age, inheritance, and education, setting him down as a Belgian by birth, and a man of letters by brave resistance to familiar household foes, we are beset by difficulties. Further classification is not easy. Where does Maeterlinck belong among the authors of

the world, and how shall we describe him? He has written plays and he has written poetry; he is the author of essays and of biographical sketches. His writings include things spiritual as well as things scientific. He has dealt, in the most convincing way, with spiritual beauty; but perhaps the best of all his books is a scientific study of the humble and familiar bee. It may be because of this wide variety in his writings that he has been claimed by many schools and classified under many heads. He is called a symbolist, a moralist, a mystic, a clever dramatist, a spiritual essayist, a poet writing in the medium of prose, a naturalist and man of science who carelessly assumes the clothes of a philosopher. He has been likened to Marcus Aurelius, Plotinus, Madame Guyon, Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, Emerson, and others; and the caustic Bernard Shaw has accused people of endeavoring to confer upon him the "Order of the Swan." Latterly he has been described as "the greatest living poet of love, if not the greatest poet of love that ever lived." And none of these appellations is without some reason to support it. In his love of the weird and gruesome he has some kinship with Poe. In his meditative vein he shows descent from the great Aurelius. I am not familiar enough with Walt Whitman to be able to pass upon his affinity there, but any one can recognize in his writings the influence of Tauler, Ruysbroeck, and their school.

One reason for these similarities is found, perhaps, in the fact, which may here be noted, that Maeterlinck is a persistent but discriminating borrower. He knows a good thing when he sees it, and he is not above being helped and taught by others. What he receives, however, it is hardly necessary to add, he thoroughly transforms and makes his own. Taking the crude, unminted metal, he passes it through the furnace of his glowing fancy and stamps it with a glory that it did not have before. Thus in his latest play of *Mary Magdalene* he frankly confesses himself indebted for two central features of the drama to Heyse's *Maria von Magdala*, and he frankly tells us in the preface that, when he wrote to Heyse and asked permission to use and develop the situations, his request was curtly and even threateningly refused. *Monna Vanna*, it has been pointed out, "owes its *milieu*, and one of its structural features, to Browning's *Luria*, while *Pelleas and*

*Mélisande* finds its roots in Dante's story of 'the two who go forever on the accursed air.'" Moreover, there can be no question of the kinship of *The Blue Bird* with *Peter Pan*; and the Belgian playwright, I believe, has bestowed on Mr. Barrie the title of godfather to the play. The greatest similarity, however, is undoubtedly with Emerson, who was himself so broad and free a borrower. Indeed, it is not without good reason that Maeterlinck has been hailed as the "European Emerson." Oftentimes, when you compare selected passages from the essays or writings of the two men, it is difficult to guess offhand which one of them is speaking. Which of them said this, for instance:

Man is always throwing his praise or blame on events, and does not see that he only is real, and the world his mirror and echo. He imputes the stroke to fortune, which in reality himself strikes.

Those of us who have explored the treasure-chambers of *The Buried Temple* would perhaps select this as one of the gems to be discovered there. As a matter of fact, it occurs in Emerson's "Sovereignty of Ethics." Again we read:

There are certain fastnesses within our soul that lie buried so deep that love alone can venture down, and it returns laden with undreamed jewels whose lustre can only be seen as they pass from our open hand to the hand of one we love.

That, we think, sounds familiar, and we search the essays on the "Over-Soul" and "Love"; but we must turn to the pages of *Wisdom and Destiny* to find it. Maeterlinck declares:

What I *say* often counts for little; but my presence, the attitude of my soul, my future and my past, that which takes birth in me and that which is dead. . . . All this it is that speaks to you at that tragic moment.

And who, as he reads, can help thinking of Emerson's declaration:

What you *do* speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say. Character speaks over our head. The infallible index of true character is found in the tone man takes.

Again, there is Maeterlinck's description of the "inevitable self" that waits to meet us at the end of all our journeys:

Whether you climb up the mountain or go down the hill to the valley, whether you journey to the end of the world or merely

walk around your house, none but yourself shall you meet on the highway of fate. If Judas goes forth to-night, it is towards Judas that his steps will tend.

And Emerson, we know, agreed with him:

Travelling [he says, in speaking of self-reliance] is a fool's paradise. I pack my trunk, embrace my friends, embark on the sea, and at last wake up in Naples, and there beside me is the stern fact, the sad self, unrelenting, identical, that I fled from. I seek the Vatican and the palaces. I affect to be intoxicated with sights and suggestions, but I am not intoxicated. My giant goes with me wherever I go.

So there are other similarities which are too numerous to name. We remember Emerson's verses:

Yon ridge of purple landscape,  
Yon sky between the walls,  
Hold all the hidden wonders  
In scanty intervals.

And we wonder if Maeterlinck did not have them somewhere in the back of his mind when he wrote:

There are eternal crevices even in the humble walls of a hovel, and the smallest windows cannot take away a line or a star from the immensity of heavenly space.

But enough! As these quotations indicate, there can be no doubt of how Maeterlinck would classify himself if he were granted that extraordinary privilege. He is a Mystic, pure and simple. As a mystic he began to write, and as a mystic he reveals himself in all his more important works and studies. But before I go on to estimate him in this light, and to make a more careful analysis of his teaching, let me justify myself by his own deliberate words and judgment, and then let me hurriedly remind you of the essential teaching and the historical method of the mystics of all ages.

First of all let it be said that whether he makes good the title or not, Maeterlinck considers himself a genuine mystic. He is confident of his inheritance, and claims descent from Ruysbroeck and Tauler, from Philo and Swedenborg and Fox,—believing himself no foundling nor a son by mere adoption, but a spiritual heir. In his early writings he speaks enthusiastically of

the great Plotinus, who, he declares, "of all the intellects known to me draws nearest to the divine." He quotes from Porphyry and the gnostics as though he had fed his soul upon their writings and had not simply dipped into their mystic shadows, as so many are content to do. Moreover, in his writings he has carefully justified and eloquently defended the mystic philosophy and teaching. "Many people," he says, "take it for a wild, dark dream, crossed with vivid flashes of lightning, whereas, I believe that the writings of the mystics are the purest diamonds in the vast treasures of humanity; their truths have a strange privilege over ordinary truths, for they neither grow old nor die; and whether they come from India or Greece, they have neither country nor date, and wherever we meet them they are calm and real as God himself." "We are dealing here," he adds, "with the most *exact* of *sciences*, and not with a dream, for dreams have no roots, while the glowing flower of divine metaphysics has its mysterious roots in Persia and in India, in Greece as well as Egypt." These, it is clear enough, are the words of a man who believes that he has found the philosophy of life, containing definite truths of the deepest spiritual nature.

Of mysticism in general I need to speak in none but the briefest possible way, and that for the simple sake of clearness. We shall agree, I suppose, that mysticism is one of the many paths in life which lead to God. More than this, it is not merely one of the paths, it is the straightest path, and, according to those in every age who have found it out and gone that way, it leads directly into the presence of the Holy and Divine. The mystic is one who looks within, lives within, and loves to interpret all things from the standpoint of the soul. He believes in the supreme guidance of the "inner light," and holds to the necessity of trusting instinct, and honoring emotion. While the naturalist looks without, the mystic peers within; while the man of science studies the phenomena of outward nature, the mystic is absorbed with the phenomena of human nature. The one inquires, the other dreams; the first compares and classifies occurrences in the natural world, the second composes himself and contemplates things in the spiritual world which is centred in himself. Always, however, the true mystic pursues this inward path with one great



end in view; and because of the gaining of that end he has secured the attention of the world. That end is the consciousness of the divine, and a conviction that God is the great Reality. "The mystics," says Professor Rufus Jones, in his recent and most rewarding volume entitled *Studies of Mystical Religion*, "in all ages and in all lands—*semper et ubique*—have been intent on finding a direct way to God"; and he adds, in the introduction to his book, "I shall use the word mystic to express the type of religion which puts the emphasis on immediate awareness of relations with God, on direct and intimate consciousness of the Divine Presence. It is religion in its most acute, intense, and living stage." "Moreover," he says, "it has been the contention of mystics in all ages that God Himself is the ground of the soul, and that in the depths of their being all men partake of one central life. The genuine mystic, therefore, no more wants arguments to prove God's existence than the artist wants arguments to prove the reality of beauty, or the lover to prove the worth of love."

From all of this, and a great deal more that might be said or quoted, it appears that mysticism is a path of life, or avenue of thought, which, when properly pursued, conducts to a definite goal. It is a process, but it is likewise an end; it is a way of approach to truth along which, or more particularly at the end of which, one central and commanding truth has always been discovered. The way is the way of the individual soul,—along the shadowy road of quiet introspection,—but it ever has been held to lead to the consciousness of the Over-soul.

Accepting, then, as accurate these modern definitions of mysticism and its method, we go on to inquire in what sense Maeterlinck may properly be classed as a member of this historic and highly honored school. To what extent and how accurately may he be looked upon as a follower of Plotinus and Swedenborg and a true disciple of Emerson?

Now that Maeterlinck believes in the path that has been trodden in all ages by the mystics of the world there cannot be the slightest doubt. In all his leanings toward the shadowland of Self, in all his love for things unseen, in all his praise of silence, too, and his perception of the treasures that the humble hold,

our author is undoubtedly a mystic. He follows in the footsteps of those seers and solemn prophets of the soul who have declared, since the earliest time of human thought, that "within is the fountain of life,"—that within is to be found the secret of contentment and the soul of truth. A Latin motto which is said to be written over his study door fitly gives expression to his faith. The motto may be translated:

Whoever turns his outer sense  
To see his soul aright,  
He hears when no one speaks to him,  
Walks seeing through the night.

Yes, in the methods he pursues, as in the cravings of his nature, this Belgian thinker is distinctly mystical. Leave him alone for a moment, and he loses himself amid the heavy shadows that are cast by the pointed arches of some buried temple in the depths of human life; let his footsteps take their natural course, and they lead him along the winding pathways of that "double-garden," one-half of which extends across the sloping hillside of the human soul. "*La vie intérieure*" is his first and last, and it sometimes seems, his only real concern. The supreme aim of life, he tells us, is to "keep open the great road that leads from the seen to the unseen." As some one has written of him, he "comes with gentle words of wise and aspiring sincerity to impress upon the world the belief that the development and disclosure of the human soul is the ultimate aim and goal of existence." Here, in a nutshell and phrased in his own enticing way, is his teaching in this regard. "I have grown to believe," he writes, "that an old man, seated in his arm-chair, waiting patiently with his lamp beside him, giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting without comprehending the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and of his destiny,—I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life, than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or the husband who avenges his honor."

Again, to give another illustration of his thought, it is natural that such a man, when writing of so universal yet so personal

a thing as justice, should seek and find it in the secret place that is dearest and most familiar to him. "Justice," he says, "had been imagined everywhere except in man. It had dwelt in the sky. It had lurked behind rocks, it had governed the air and the sea, it had peopled an inaccessible universe. Then at last we peered into its imaginary retreats, we pressed close and examined; its throne of clouds tottered, it faded away; but at the very moment we believed it had ceased to be, behold, it reappeared and raised its head once more in the very depths of our heart."

Moreover, Maeterlinck is a mystic in this respect, that his books have hardly an impress of an epoch. Although his latest volume bears the title of *The Measures of Time*, his thoughts, his words, his innermost teachings, are practically timeless. It has been truly said of his books that most of them might have been "conceived and written a thousand years ago, and might equally, no doubt, be produced in any one of the thousands of years to come." So, too, he is a mystic in his occasional lapses into the exaggerated, the foolish, and grotesque,—a respect in which the mystics have always sinned most gravely. Thus Angelus Silesius, a daring mystic of the seventeenth century, declared: "I know that God cannot live a moment without me. If I perish he must for want of me give up the ghost. I am as important to Him as He to me. I help maintain His being, as well as He mine." Emerson approached him when he declared, "The simplest person who in his integrity worships God becomes God," and added, "I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all."

Maeterlinck's exaggerations run along a different line, and he leans over the edge of sanity particularly when he deals with death. "Our death," he says, "is the mould in which our life flows; it is death that has shaped our features. Of the dead alone should portraits be painted, for it is only they who are truly themselves." And again he says, "Whoever meets me knows all that I have done and shall do;—nay, he knows the very day on which I shall die." Of wisdom such as this we may well cry despairingly with the Psalmist, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

But if Maeterlinck is a genuine mystic in such respects as these,

and in others that we shall take account of later, let us pause here and make it evident that in the supremest sense of all—so far as arriving at the goal which the mystics of all ages have felt convinced that they reached—he distinctly and definitely fails. The old story tells us that the Magdalene went down to the dew-swept garden in the early morning light and found one waiting for her at the gate whom she took at first to be the gardener, but who turned out to be the very Saviour of her soul. And so it has been throughout the centuries, as we have seen, with the men and women whom we speak about as mystics. Their distinction has been always this,—that the way they went has brought them to the very presence of the Highest. With Maeterlinck, however, although his “thoughts all gravitate in a visionary way to the Eternal, to the Absolute,” he yet never finds, nor feels, himself face to face with a Supreme and Eternal Being who is both creator and inspirer of life. He goes down ever and again into the spacious garden of the soul, and he loves to walk and watch there. He caresses the shadows, and converses with the flowers. The bees are humming in the heavy afternoon of speculative thought, and he sees them store away the honey in the cells of quiet contemplation. But in all his musing, and his sense of mystery, he meets no shadowy form who asks for recognition, and to whom he cries out in an ecstasy of joy, “Rabboni.”

Maeterlinck, in other words, is a mystic, but a mystic who does not arrive. He sets forth on the historic road, but fails to turn up at the historic goal. He takes the well-worn path on which other pilgrims have journeyed with joy because of what it led to; but with him not joy, but fear, is met along the way which leads him nowhere in particular. Never, for example, in the writings of this so-called mystic do you find an exultant cry like that of Emerson: “O my brothers, God exists! There is a soul at the centre of Nature and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe. The whole course of things goes to teach us faith. We need only obey.” Nowhere does he proclaim the assurance that man can acquaint himself at first-hand with deity. Instead, what do we find? Only a heavy silence as to the mystery of mysteries,—the Power supreme above

us all. When we come to the end of what he has to say, we see before us a question mark. Here, for example, is a case in point. In *The Buried Temple* he declares: "It was well that the Poet who found in his God an unquestionable ideal should incessantly hold before us this definitive ideal. But today, if we look away from the truth, from the ordinary experiences of life, on what shall our eager gaze rest?" Again, we come upon some cryptic utterance like this: "It is not the incomprehensible in Nature that masters and crushes us; but the thought that Nature may possibly be governed by a conscious, superior, reasoning Will,—one that, although superhuman, has yet some kinship to the will of man."

Moreover, and what is worse, there are other connections in which he seems distinctly unreligious. Instead of finding God as the result of his quest, what he reveals is nothing but a sub-conscious, or a higher, self. "Within us," he says, "is a being that is our veritable ego;—our first-born; immemorial, illimitable, universal, and probably immortal. Our intellect, which is merely a kind of phosphorescence that plays on this inner sea, has as yet faint knowledge."

Yes, it is self, mysterious, hooded, veiled, incomprehensible self that he finds at the end of all his inner searchings; and in this self his teachings find a centre. There is neither good nor evil, neither pain nor pleasure, neither ease nor hardship, neither calamity nor happiness,—except as thinking, and our inmost feelings, make them so.

Maeterlinck, I repeat, therefore, is mystical, but not a mystic; or, let us say again, he is a mystic who does not arrive. He believes, so he tells us, in a faculty in man higher than intelligence, a faculty which he calls "mystic reason"; but that faculty, wonderful as it is, cannot penetrate the veil, nor conduct us through the realm of shadows into light. Though it discloses wonders, it knows nothing about One who is the source of wonder; and though it recognizes beauty, it knows nothing of One who is the architect of beauty.

In the ancient temple of Edfu, the most symmetrical and best preserved of all the old Egyptian temples, one is led along through gateway after gateway, from outer sunlight, fierce and glaring,

into shadow and then into deeper shadow, until one moves in almost utter darkness. Chamber opens into chamber, each one at a slightly higher level than the one preceding. Outside, behind the towering pylons, where the people gathered, is the spacious open court, roofed in by the azure sky. Within, at the opposite and furthestmost extremity, is the Holy of Holies, open to the priests alone, where the statue of the god was niched. It is a fascinating temple to explore, and at last, when the heavy gloom has silently embraced one, when chamber after chamber has been reached, and hall after hall been left behind, one comes to that holiest of holy chambers, with its solemn little niche,—a niche of dark and solid granite in a dark and silent room. It is a dramatic moment, and one which comes to be the more dramatic when one discovers that the niche is—*empty*! The statue of the god is no longer there. His worship ceased long since, and the image was thrown down, broken, and destroyed.

Thus it is in the temple of thought that Maeterlinck has built. It is a perfect structure in its way, and enriched by the highest art. It is dim and suggestive, too, with shadowy corridors that open toward the sacred shrine of life. But the niche in the Holy of Holies is an empty niche; there is nothing there. If we worship, we must worship an abstraction; if we kneel, it must be before a reach of dark and impenetrable wall.

Moreover, the analogy of the Egyptian temple, with its passages that lead one into solemn darkness, suggests another truth which is characteristic of Maeterlinck. The ordinary mystic pursues his way along the hidden avenues of life, but comes out at the last upon a bright and broadening plain. He plunges into secret darkness, but rejoices to have found thereby a glorious light. With our Belgian philosopher, however, the gloom is never lightened, the shadow never left behind. The darkness is what he revels in; and, with the darkness, all forms and fears and strange forebodings that cannot bear the light. Whether or not he is fond of shuddering himself and finds in it a species of religious awe, he is fond of making others shudder and grow cold. He is master of the art of stimulating the creepy feelings of life. In some of his plays he seems anxious to set forth mystery as something that is altogether terrifying. We see people huddled to-

gether at a window out of which they fear to look, or pressing against a door which they dread to open.<sup>1</sup> The scene is generally laid on the edge of a dark and pathless wood. In the play which he called *The Blind* the people are lost in a forest, and in *Pelléas and Mélisande* the lovers first encounter one another in a lonely and distant glade. The shadows are heavy. The dusk is everywhere. The sun is setting,—in fact, it has never fully risen. But if the gloom of the silent forest is on one side of his plays, the gloom of the stormy ocean, with tumbling waves that roll in from a boundless deep, is on the other. The ocean is always lashed into fury by a storm, while the sky is dark and full of thunder. Situated thus, between the two great natural symbols of impenetrable mystery, the poet pictures for us a dark and gloomy castle which is half in ruins. In the courtyard of the castle, or perhaps by the edge of the forest, there is a deep, black well, and beneath the crumbling castle walls we are led along dismal passageways and creaking corridors into silent crypts and gloomy dungeons. All the time the wind is howling, and the waves of the troubled sea are beating at the gates, and threatening to burst through the habitation man has built.

I remember that as a child I used to be strangely fascinated by the title of a book which stood upon the library shelves at home. I cannot recall that I ever opened it, and to this day I do not know exactly what it dealt with; but it was called *The Night Side of Nature*. That is the side of nature which appeals to Maeterlinck; and it is the side of human nature, too. His very characters are shadows, and when we strive to grasp their meaning they fade away into nothingness. Now all of this is mystical in the popular and superficial sense of being hazy and indistinct; but philosophically mystical it is not. The genuine mystic always deals with life;—with soul-life and with life in heaven, if you will, but still with life. Maeterlinck, however, is forever exploring the spaces of the soul, where death and gloom, not life and light, are what prevail. Some one has called him a “meteorologist of the soul”; and so he is. But like many another of the ordinary craft it is storms and tempests that he usually reports.

It is interesting to notice, however, that within recent years

<sup>1</sup>A. Symons, *The Symbolic Movement in Literature*, p. 158.

he has left definitely behind him this morbid attitude of youth. In place of a dread of the unknown has come trust, and an almost superstitious awe has yielded to complacent confidence. In other words, he has gradually shaken off the shadow of the Jesuit college where he studied and has come out into the noon-day of the twentieth century. So much is this the case that critics, who are always bound to find some fault, are now complaining of his easy optimism, and are tearing rents in what they think the flimsy garments of his latter-day philosophy. But the change has really been a growth, and a natural and wholesome one at that. What is more, it has made him in some respects a truer mystic than he was at first. He himself has given expression to this change, and says:

It is consoling to observe that you follow the same route as the soul of this great world: that we have the same intentions, the same hopes, the same tests, and almost,—except for our dreams of justice and pity, which is our own specific work,—the same feelings. . . . That is why our attitude in the face of the mystery of these forces is changed. It is no longer that of fear, but of courage. It is no longer the kneeling of a slave before his master, but it permits the look of equal to equal; for we carry within ourselves the equal of the most profound and the greatest mysteries.

And yet I do not say all this in the spirit of foolish criticism. I am not of those who are disposed to quarrel with talent, and least of all with genius; especially when the genius is one that seeks the mystery of the soul for inspiration, and proclaims the saving grace of individual character. Moreover, Maeterlinck being a mystic who does not arrive, he seems to me particularly typical of the age in which we live. Like all great writers he voices the unspoken feelings of his time; and among the interesting phenomena of the particular period in which we live is the somewhat depressing fact that while the thirst for the divine remains unchanged, the means for the slaking of that thirst appear to be taken from us. People wish to believe, but often cannot. They have religion, or something which passes for it; but oftentimes are not religious. How many are the people who might fitly be described as agnostic mystics! They have the instincts and desires which fired and inspired saints and seers of old; but far



too often they find themselves compelled to go without the glorious vision and the all-sustaining faith.

In this respect our Belgian prophet is among the most modern of all writers, reflecting the doubts and wonderings of his day. But while perhaps the most significant thing about him as a mystic is the one that I have pointed out, it would be a mistake and, worse than a mistake, it would be a grave injustice to ourselves and him to pass over without emphasis many other features in his teachings which are hardly less distinctive, and of very positive worth. Although he may not reach the mystic goal and achieve direct vision of the Highest, yet on the way he has seen and taught us things of great importance. His very "glorification," as Chesterton calls it, "of the inside of things at the expense of the outside," is not only a corollary of his mystical bent of mind, but a corollary which calls for every emphasis that can possibly be given. Welcome, indeed, in these days of superficial, and often silly, materialism, is the prophet of a scientific mysticism; and thrice welcome at a time when most of us are intent on improving the mere conditions of life is a well-accepted teacher who enforces the supremacy of life itself. The value of Maeterlinck's teaching, therefore, has the general value of all teaching which calls attention to self-reliance, self-development, and the need of spiritual culture. And it has much more than this. Under the spell of his genius the importance of the life within is given fresh interpretation and has taken on a dignity and glory which hardly had been given it before.

Most important, perhaps, but at any rate of genuine value and significance, is the teaching of this man in regard to the soul's relationship, or attitude, to trouble and disaster. He gives new emphasis and meaning to the old assertion that "the soul is its own refuge, and its own defence." Nowhere does he rise so close to ecstasy, or glow with such a fervor of conviction, as when he pictures a human soul facing some terrible and inevitable calamity and calmly defying it, saying in substance to the shadowy form, as it approaches, "You can have no power over me except as I supply the weapons." That is dramatic and sublime. For how often do people exaggerate and arm their troubles, making them terrible, indeed, and capable of inflicting mortal wounds!

"Physical suffering apart," he says in *Wisdom and Destiny*, "not a single sorrow exists that can touch us except through our thought; and whence do our thoughts derive the weapons wherewith they attack or defend us? We suffer very little from suffering itself; but from the manner wherein we accept it, overwhelming sorrow may spring."

Less unique, and much more commonplace, is his constant reiteration of the fact that the soul is the source and seat of all true content and happiness. This trite and familiar truth is lifted out of the dust of what is familiar and out-worn, being presented to us at the hand of genius in new and shining garments. "All men can learn to be happy," he assures us, "and the teaching of it is easy. . . . Smiles are as catching as tears, and periods men have termed happy were periods when there were some who knew of their happiness. . . . There is more joy in the smallest joy whereof we are conscious than in the approach of the mightiest happiness that enters not into our soul."

Again, Maeterlinck stands for what we may call the democracy of the moral life. He believes in the Republic of the Soul. The world within, as he sees it, pays little attention to the ethical gradations and classifications which are so distinctive of our class-morality. "Not to all men," he reminds us, "is it given to be hero or genius, victorious, admirable always, or even to be simply happy in exterior things; but it lies in the power of the least-favored among us to be loyal, and gentle, and just; to be generous and brotherly;—he that has least gifts of all can learn to look on his fellows without envy or hatred, without malice or futile regret; the outcast can take his strange, silent part (which is not always that of least service) in the gladness of those who are near him; and he that has barely a talent can still learn to forgive an offence with an ever nobler forgiveness."

He applies the same deep principle to degrees of insight, or revelation, believing with Emerson,

There is no great, and no small,  
To the Soul that maketh all.

"Not an evening passes," he is convinced, "but the smallest thing suffices to ennoble the soul"; and he is very sure, as he says

in *The Treasure of the Humble*, "that the day you lingered to follow a ray of light through a crevice in the door of life, you did something as great as though you had bandaged the wounds of your enemy, for at that moment you no longer had any enemies."

Maeterlinck has stood very attentively and reverently close up to the narrow wall that separates the finite from the infinite, the human from the divine. If he has not heard certain voices that have always seemed of chief significance, let us at least be thankful that he has told us honestly what he does hear, and in language of transcendent beauty. The world is full enough of echoes, and it is hardly worth our while to pay attention to them. But when a living voice is raised that tells of personal revelation, and expresses some of our unuttered longings, we may wisely stop and pay attention. And in the meantime we may well believe that not yet has this thinker given us his full or final word. It is much to be hoped that it is with him, as with the fine patrician house in Bruges which bears, he has told us, on beams and pediment the suggestive device,—“Within me there is more.”